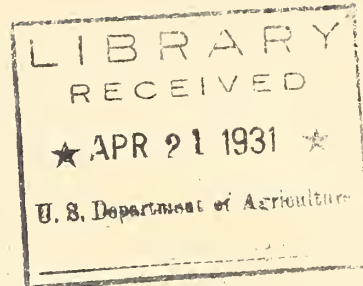


Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



THE CANNERS' BILL

A radio talk by Dr. P. B. Dunbar, Assistant Chief, Federal Food and Drug Administration, delivered through WRC and 40 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, April 9, 1931.

--oOo--

Three decades ago--before the passage of the Federal food and drugs act---when the housewife donned her poke bonnet and went to the store for, let us say, a can of tomatoes, she was entering into a deal that had some of the marks of the long chance. She asked for what she wanted and she put her money down in good faith. Maybe she got what she wanted--maybe she did not.

I am afraid that I cannot say the whole canning trade in those days was notable for the quality of the foods it was putting out. And this sad state of affairs was not limited to tomatoes. There was at least a popular feeling that buying almost any kind of canned food, then, was an interesting diversion for people who also liked to try to beat the shell game at the county fair. In too many instances this feeling was well founded.

But, in 24 years' enforcement of the national pure food law, a change has come about. An amazing change for the better in the quality of canned foods on the American market. And the public, long-suffering, it is true, but highly appreciative of a good turn, has fallen to and bought more and more of these foods that come in cans. The food and drugs act specifies that foods be unadulterated, wholesome, and honestly labeled. The canning industry as a whole has supported this law admirably. The law has helped the public. The law has encouraged ethical and profitable business.

There was a loophole, however, in the food and drugs act in so far as canned foods are concerned. That loophole has now been plugged through the enactment of an amendment to the law, the so-called Canners' Bill. The President signed the bill that amended the pure food law July 8 last. And the canning industry itself was the power that put that bill through. The canners, not satisfied that existing standards for canned foods, fought for a bill that imposes more rigid restrictions upon themselves. It is not going to lighten the task of the Federal Food and Drug Administration to have to take up the burden imposed by this amendment. But that task will be carried on, as effectively as personnel and working funds will permit.

I believe that enforcement of the Canners' Bill will do the consumer and honest business a lot of good. This new measure is going to make it much harder for the purchaser of canned foods not to get her money's worth. That will mean that more buyers will get their full money's worth. How? Well, suppose we go back to tomatoes.

Over

You go to the store and ask for a can. If you are one of the many who buy with discrimination--- one of those who read labels--- who accept no substitutes for what you really want--- the chances are that you will get just about what you ask for and pay for. But there are many kinds of canned tomatoes. Some cans contain better tomatoes than others. They may all be wholesome and good to eat. But some are better than others--- and the buyer has a right to know just what kind she is getting.

The same general principle naturally applies to other canned foods: corn, or cherries, peas, pears, peaches, sauerkraut, shrimp.

Everybody knows that there are different qualities of canned foods, just as there are different qualities of fruits and vegetables and the other good things that go into cans. There are also superior and inferior methods of doing the canning. This amendment, then, authorizes legal quality standards for all canned foods that are enclosed in hermetically sealed containers and sterilized by heat--- with two exceptions. The exceptions are canned milk and canned meat and meat products---not fish and poultry. The amendment gives the Secretary of Agriculture authority to set standards of quality, condition, and fill of container of all canned food with the two exceptions I mentioned. If a product falls below the standard of quality, condition, or fill established, it must bear a plain and conspicuous statement of such a nature as to advise the buyer that that food is below standard. The designation has been set. It is **BELOW U. S. STANDARD-- LOW QUALITY BUT NOT ILLEGAL**. Those words will be the buyer's guide after a certain date, a period of at least 90 days after formulation of official standards. Standards for canned peaches, peas, and pears have already been worked out, announced by the Secretary, and will go into effect May 18. Tentative standards for canned tomatoes, apricots, and cherries have been announced and, following official hearings and consideration by the trade, the consumer, and the Department of Agriculture, will become law. Standards for other canned foods are being worked out and will be officially announced as soon as possible.

Now, what will the enforcement of the Cannery Bill mean to the buyer? It will mean---

First, that quality and condition standards for practically all classes of canned foods except meat and meat-food products, and canned milk, will be eventually set by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Second, that a standard fill of container for such products will be enforced. This standard of fill has been drawn up already, thus guaranteeing the housewife protection against slack-filled cans.

Third, that the buyer of canned foods will not have to worry about slack fills, and as standards for each class are formulated and promulgated, about getting an inferior or below-standard product for the price she pays for a standard-quality or superior food. Canned goods falling below the standard will be conspicuously labeled: **BELOW U. S. STANDARD-- LOW QUALITY BUT NOT ILLEGAL**. Since the food and drugs act prohibits the sale in inter-state commerce of adulterated, misbranded, or injurious foods, the housewife who desires a cheaper product for some particular reason will be perfectly safe in buying canned foods that bear this low standard label.

The value of the Cannery Bill to the housewife, to the consumer, will be the assurance that the canned foods she purchases meet a definite, minimum quality requirement established by a Government agency. The amendment will not constitute a bar to the manufacture and sale of wholesome canned food of a quality lower than the standard, but such products will have to be labeled so that if the buyer wishes a less expensive canned food, she will be able to buy it with full knowledge of its character and, it is presumed, at a lower price. We in the Food and Drug Administration feel that a housewife with a limited budget should be enabled, under the terms of the Cannery Bill, to buy a substandard product within the reach of her pocketbook which will carry the nutritive if not the aesthetic value of standard canned foods--- provided she reads intelligently the labeling required by the amendment to appear on the can.

It is not the Food and Drug Administration's conception of the purpose of Congress, in enacting this bill, that the labeling for substandard foods was intended to stigmatize unduly the article to which it is applied. The amendment makes it very clear that its purpose is to let the consumer know what goods are below standard, but the substandard product will be wholesome and edible, even if not so palatable or so attractive as the standard product. If the food were unwholesome or inedible, its distribution would be illegal under the terms of the national pure food laws.

I might say, in conclusion, that if any of you want a copy of the Cannery Bill, together with standards formulated for canned peas, peaches, and pears, as well as of the legal label designation for substandard goods and the fill-of-container specifications required by the bill, you can get all this in a circular called SERVICE AND REGULATORY ANNOUNCEMENTS, F. D. No. 4. Write the Federal Food and Drug Administration, Washington, D. C., or the radio station to which you are listening.

And now, good-day, and thank you.
